

Parks & Recreation

Introduction

Coconino County’s outstanding scenery and healthy natural environment provide diverse recreational opportunities; these amenities also factor strongly into its economy and quality of life. As our population increases, we face a growing need to maintain adequate **OPEN SPACE** and recreational opportunities and to minimize the potential for them to become overused. Key issues include addressing **WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE** conflicts, accommodating diverse uses, protecting natural and historic resources, and ensuring that management agencies coordinate with each other. The County Parks and Recreation Department can help ensure that we not only retain our open space, but also that it remains accessible to all users for its scenic, ecological, recreational, and educational values. This Element characterizes the county’s recreational amenities—its **PARKS**, **NATURAL AREAS**, and **TRAILS**—and provides guidelines for managing and improving them.

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The Conservation Framework Relationship

The mission of the Parks and Recreation Department includes preserving our natural resources, historical resources, **WETLANDS**, and open space.⁴¹ Through sound management, we can protect our resources from degradation and preserve the county’s rare and critical **ECOSYSTEMS**, **HABITATS**, and **SPECIES**, along with its **CULTURAL RESOURCES**.

All five ecological principles factor into the goals and policies of this Element. In addition, **CONSERVATION GUIDELINES C, E, & K** are particularly important because they address human impacts to habitat that could result from overuse of recreational areas.

Our Purpose & Vision

Our vision includes offering a variety of parks and recreational opportunities throughout the county. Therefore, we must not only preserve open space but also protect important natural areas and provide **STEWARDSHIP** for them. We envision a highly integrated system of **ACTIVE** and **PASSIVE** recreational opportunities nested within a community-based network of parks, open spaces, and critical natural areas. The *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan* addresses concerns about parks and recreation by establishing policies that honor our past by protecting historic resources and archaeological sites. These policies also focus on providing recreational access via a trail system that links communities, public lands, and activity centers while maintaining the integrity of ecosystems. They allow **OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE (OHV)** use on designated routes but discourage such use where impacts to natural and cultural resources could be significant. The policies in this plan strive to balance our need for providing diverse recreational opportunities with our need to preserve the county’s scenic character.



Natural Areas

SEE ALSO PAGE 84

Land Use: Landscapes & Open Space

OPEN SPACE

A primarily undeveloped landscape that provides scenic, ecological, or recreational values or that is set aside for resource protection or conservation; an area of managed production such as forestland, rangeland, or agricultural land that is essentially free of visible obstructions.

With exceptional features like the Grand Canyon, Oak Creek Canyon, and national forests and monuments, Coconino County has Arizona's highest visitation rate to outdoor parks and recreation areas⁴² and Flagstaff has the highest number of outdoor equipment shops per capita. Given these statistics, the county has great potential for providing unsurpassed outdoor recreation opportunities—both **ACTIVE** and **PASSIVE**—in the form of **PARKS**, **TRAILS**, and access to **OPEN SPACE**. Outdoor recreation has become increasingly popular. According to the *National Survey of Recreation and the Environment*, hiking and backpacking comprised the second and third fastest growing outdoor recreation activities in 2002. Bird watching was number one.⁴³

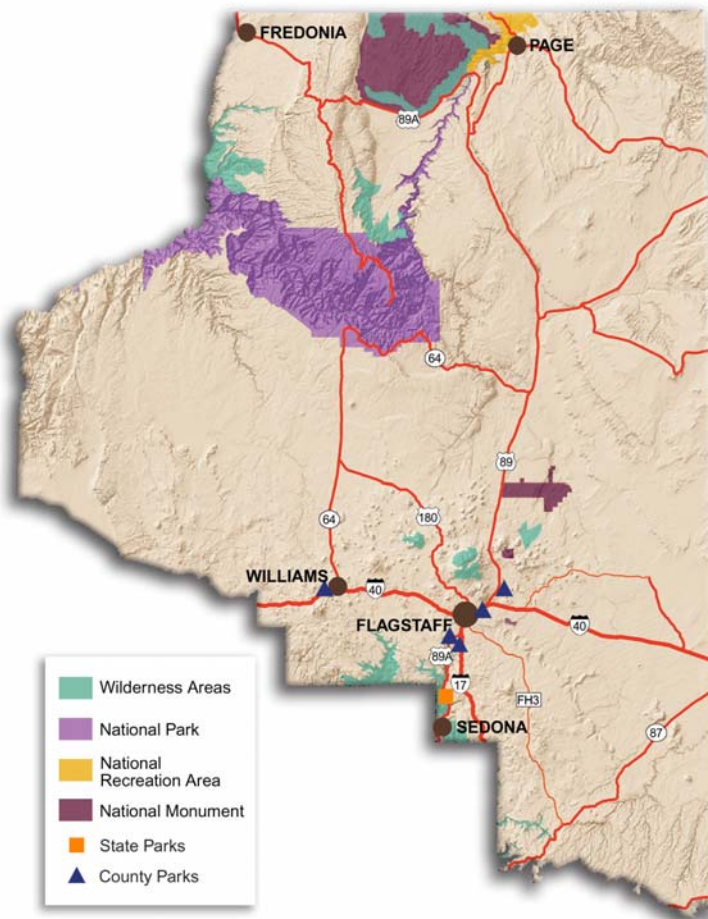
NATURAL AREAS—parks that emphasize the conservation of natural resources—may include linear **GREENWAYS**. Passive recreation activities are permitted in these parks, which may feature amenities such as nonmotorized trails, picnic tables, wildlife observation areas, and **INTERPRETIVE EDUCATION** signs.

Plans are underway to protect unique lands within Coconino County—privately owned land or **STATE TRUST LANDS** that are valuable to wildlife but may be available for develop-

ment.⁴⁴ The **COCONINO PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PROGRAM (CPOS)** looks to fund the acquisition of state trust lands identified as “high priority for retention as open space” by the *Flagstaff Area Open Space and Greenways Plan*.⁴⁵ These lands, which lie outside of Flagstaff's **URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY**, comprise much of the scenic viewshed and several natural areas surrounding Flagstaff. The City of Flagstaff and Coconino County have also partnered to petition the Arizona State Land Department to reclassify selected state trust lands around Flagstaff, making them eligible for **GROWING SMARTER** grants. These petitions have been submitted under the **ARIZONA PRESERVE INITIATIVE (API)**. However, the funds from *Growing Smarter* and CPOS will be insufficient to acquire all the land designated for open space. Additional funding can be leveraged through partnerships between the County, the City of Flagstaff, community groups, private sources, and, potentially, the federal government.

The County should work with local residents, scientists, and environmentalists to identify lands with the most significant resources and prioritize them. Community stewardship will continue into the future, complemented by research by organizations such as Northern Arizona University's Centennial Forest. The Parks and Recreation Department can manage these lands in a way that allows public access while protecting the resource.

Parks, Monuments, & Wilderness Areas



Goal: Provide for the stewardship of important natural areas.

Policies:

1. The County promotes the protection of important natural resources through collaboration in acquiring, managing, and interpreting natural areas. *SEE CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: B, C, D, E*
2. The County supports access to open spaces for all residents where suitable.

Trails

TRAILS connect people to **PARKS, WILDERNESS AREAS, OPEN SPACE**, neighborhoods, schools, shopping, and work. Popular for recreation, exercise, and commuting, trails are used by walkers, equestrians, hikers, backpackers, runners, birdwatchers, and bicyclists. In Arizona, 77 percent of residents consider themselves recreational trail users.⁴⁶ The county's diverse outdoor recreation opportunities could be enhanced by a comprehensive network of trail systems that features a mixture of recreational and commuter trails linking communities.

In 2000, the Parks and Recreation Department completed an inventory that recorded 168 trails in Coconino County, excluding user-created **SOCIAL TRAILS** that are not recognized or maintained by a land management agency.⁴⁷ Ninety percent of the inventoried trails are managed by federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service. Twenty percent—primitive hiking or equestrian trails—lie within designated wilderness areas that are closed to bicycles. Only 17 percent of the trails would be considered urban, or commuter, trails; most of these are part of the **FLAGSTAFF URBAN TRAILS SYSTEM (FUTS)**. Results of the inventory also indicate that most trails are managed for backcountry recreation and may be too challenging or remote for many, reflecting a need to provide a wider range of opportunities for varying abilities, skills, and activities in areas closer to where people live. Of particular concern is the **WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE**, where social trails may evolve and create a maze of routes through the forest around a neighborhood. These user-created trails are not maintained and are often poorly located, leading to unwanted ecological, scenic, and social impacts.

The Forest Service began working with Munds Park/Pinewood in 2002 to develop a community trails plan. The resulting plan will develop designated **TRAILHEADS** or forest access points, obliterate unwanted trails, improve existing trails by relocating or redesigning them, establish a logically connected system of trails with clear destinations and linkages, and implement a signage system. This plan is a model for other communities throughout the county. Trail and forest access needs can also be addressed before building a subdivision. Developers submitting proposals could work with the Community Development Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Forest Service, and/or other management agencies to address these needs. In many cases, access can be provided through **TRAIL EASEMENTS** connecting subdivisions to adjacent forestlands.

HISTORIC TRAILS are a unique resource that recounts the travels of early explorers and settlers. These trails enhance tourism, provide educational and recreational opportunities, and commemorate our unique history. Some of the earliest known trails in the county trace the migration corridors of native peoples and the exploratory routes of the Spanish, missionaries, traders, prospectors, soldiers, and settlers. Many of these original corridors were transformed into wagon routes, recreation trails, ranching roads, highways, or train corridors. As of 2002, no trails in the county were designated as National Historic Trails; however, several were under consideration pending the results of studies. The Native American routes that traverse parts of the county are also important resources; they include the Salt Trail, which members of the Hopi Tribe use to enter the Grand Canyon. Only a handful of these trails are known to the public.

SEE ALSO PAGE 58

Circulation: Nonmotorized
Circulation



John Aber



Grant Cooper



Again, partnerships will be essential to identify, protect, and interpret historic trails since the majority cross jurisdictional boundaries. As of 2003, no one had developed a concise list of historic trails or consistent plans across jurisdictions for interpretative education, preservation, or recognition. The County is in a unique position to help coordinate land managers, trail users, neighborhoods, developers, and interest groups in finding common solutions.

Goal: Support a regional system of trails that link communities, public lands, and activity centers.

Policies:

3. The County supports a comprehensive approach to addressing the need for public lands access, continuity of trail networks, provisions for nonmotorized circulation, and resource protection through community trails plans.
4. To protect sensitive natural and cultural resources, the County encourages the identification and development of trails designed to accommodate a high level of use while minimizing impacts to the environment. *SEE CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: A, C, D, E, K*
5. Development projects must consider and plan for public land access and the design and maintenance of proposed trails, trailheads, and bicycle lanes that meet County guidelines.
6. In coordination with developers, community groups, and land management agencies, the County encourages regional planning of nonmotorized circulation infrastructure and facilities, such as trails and bike lanes, that link destination areas, community activity centers, and where appropriate designated access points to public lands.
7. Partnerships are encouraged among the County, trail managers, trail users, and neighborhoods to improve trail safety and access, user information, volunteer stewardship, linkages between long-distance trails, and recognition of historic trails.

Federal & State Lands



As Coconino County's population has grown, recreational use has surged on both public and private lands.⁴⁸ Recognizing recreation as a land use is important because impacts can be significant in some areas.⁴⁹ Trails and campsites have proliferated in and around populated areas as well as in some heavily visited remote areas. User conflicts have also become a growing concern for land managers. Managing recreational use in a way that minimizes impacts to sensitive areas involves locating facilities appropriately and educating users, particularly in the **WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE**, where the County will become the primary provider of recreational opportunities.

Most recreation areas are managed by the federal government, Arizona State Parks, Coconino County, local municipalities, or tribal entities. The federal government manages 54 percent of the 140 sites identified in the *Recreation Resource Inventory*;⁵⁰ most sites involve low intensity uses in the Coconino, Kaibab, or Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. Municipalities manage 30 percent of the sites; most of these involve higher intensity uses in Flagstaff. The remainder are managed by private, tribal, County, and state entities. The National Park Service manages a variety of sites including national monuments and parks. The



Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service manage vast amounts of undeveloped lands, including **WILDERNESS AREAS** such as Kachina Peaks, Red Rock Secret Mountain, Sycamore Canyon, Paria Canyon, Vermilion Cliffs, and other congressionally designated sites. Virtually all federal land surrounding existing communities is important for **OPEN SPACE** values and recreation.

OHVs present management challenges because the number of users is increasing and vehicles are not always used appropriately. This has not only caused growing conflicts between user groups but also a cumulative degradation of the land. OHVs include sport utility vehicles, pickup trucks, four-wheel-drive and high-clearance vehicles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorcycles, dune buggies, and snowmobiles. Twenty-one percent of Arizonans consider themselves motorized trail users.⁵¹ Considerable OHV use occurs on lands managed by the Forest Service, BLM, and the State Land Department. OHV users are motivated by the opportunity to observe scenic beauty, enjoy nature, access hunting areas more easily, and escape crowds. They also either enjoy the solitude or the sport and exhilaration of reaching their destination. OHVs also offer recreational opportunities for people with limited mobility such as senior citizens or those with disabilities. Arizona State Parks, the State Land Department, and Arizona Game and Fish Department all have staff dedicated to addressing OHV management and education issues. Arizona State Parks also has an OHV grant program that helps fund management and use projects statewide. Agencies coordinate to share information to address these complex issues more effectively. OHV users and agencies can also work together to address user needs, resource impacts, and user group conflicts. The key to managing OHV use management is improving communication, coordination, and support among agencies and users.

Goal: **Manage recreational uses in a manner that minimizes impacts to communities and the environment.**

Policies:

8. The County supports private land managers, management agencies, and citizen groups in their efforts to coordinate planning and maintenance of recreational opportunities that minimize adverse impacts to natural systems and residential areas. SEE CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: A, I, K
9. The County supports and will assist other agencies with the planning and development of designated OHV routes and educational information that addresses the needs and impacts of OHV users.

County Parks & Recreation Areas

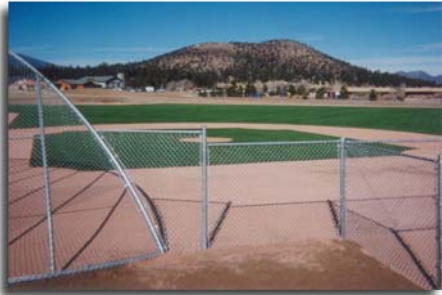
Pressures have increased for additional recreational uses on County, City, and privately owned land. The County Parks and Recreation Department envisions partnering with others to offer a variety of recreational experiences, to provide quality facilities and services, to protect natural and historic areas, and to develop educational opportunities. County **PARKS** can unite people of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

As of 2002, the Parks and Recreation Department managed six County parks—Fort Tuthill and Sawmill in Flagstaff, Cataract Lake in Williams, Raymond Park and Pumphouse Greenway in Kachina Village, and Peaks View in Doney Park. The County also manages equestrian stables and facilities, campgrounds at both Fort Tuthill and Cataract

WILDERNESS AREA

A congressionally designated area of undeveloped land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.





Lake, the annual county fair and fairground facility rentals, a performing arts amphitheater, an annual horse racing event, trails at Fort Tuthill, and a segment of the Arizona Trail.⁵²

On November 5, 2002, voters approved a $\frac{1}{8}$ of one cent increase in the county sales tax to fund **CPOS**. The goals of this program are to acquire and protect lands that preserve water quality, **WETLANDS**, forests, wildlife habitat, and other natural areas, as well as parks, trails, historic, and cultural sites. CPOS will fund new facilities: a park in Tuba City, three Navajo interpretive sites, and trails in Fredonia and Doney Park. Proposed **NATURAL AREA** acquisitions include Observatory Mesa, the old growth forest west of Flagstaff (near the Naval Observatory and Arboretum), Rogers Lake, and lands near Walnut Canyon and west of Kachina Village. CPOS will also fund improvements at Fort Tuthill, Cataract Lake, Pumphouse Greenway, Raymond Park, Peaks View Park, and Sawmill Park.

The *Recreation Resource Inventory* identified needs that Coconino County should meet for trails linking communities and public lands, for historic sites and trails, for protecting significant natural areas, and for parks and recreation opportunities in areas not served by cities.⁵³ The County can benefit from developing **LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS**, which would identify population levels that trigger the need for recreational facilities. Management plans should be developed for new parks to establish consistent, high-quality maintenance, operations, and use standards based on those of the National Recreation and Park Association. **USER FEES** may be necessary to offset operational costs for expanded services and programs.⁵⁴

Goal: Plan for and provide a variety of recreational opportunities throughout the county, in both developed parks and natural areas.

Policies:

10. The County shall strive to be a model of exemplary conservation practice in park and facility development, management, maintenance, and operations. SEE CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: A, B, C, G, H
11. The County shall strive to secure reliable funding for the County Parks and Recreation Department to ensure adequate resources for future park and open space management.
12. The County will employ a variety of alternative development and management methods and collaborative efforts to reduce the costs of protecting and acquiring land and trails.
13. In order to ensure that needs of residents are being met, public input will be sought and considered in the development of new park plans.



Neighborhood Parks

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS, which may be operated by homeowners' associations or neighborhood groups, are developed sites that feature active recreation facilities such as sports fields, basketball courts, skate parks, and playgrounds. As community amenities that provide places for family gatherings, exercise, and relaxation.⁵⁵ Parks can also offer educational opportunities through signage or through historic structures. Access to neighborhood parks is important for young people.

Neighborhood parks can add value to a **SUBDIVISION**. In existing developments, parks can be created by designating nearby open space for recreational park use; alternatively, this open space can be left in its natural state. Open space in new developments could later be developed with park facilities such as basketball courts and picnic tables. Although the County does not operate or manage neighborhood parks, it addresses them through the planning and zoning process.

Goal: Support the development of a variety of neighborhood recreation areas and facilities.

Policies:

14. Recreation facilities shall be viewed by the County as a land use and environmental impacts carefully considered in the review of recreational development projects. *SEE CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: A, B, C, E*
15. In the design of new residential developments, the County encourages developers to set aside neighborhood recreation areas to be maintained by a homeowners' association in areas that will not be served by a public park.



Grant Cooper



PETER DRUCKER

*"Plans are only good intentions
unless they immediately
degenerate into hard work."*

